

Shame— The Dark Matter of the Psyche

SCIENTISTS ASSERT THAT DARK MATTER and Dark Energy permeate our universe though neither have been observed directly. Their presence is inferred by their impact on visible matter. The motion of galaxies and structure of our cosmos are best explained by positing that our entire *visible* world is embedded in a vast matrix of *invisible* (i.e., dark) *stuff* that comprises no less than 95% of the total mass/energy of the universe. This is astrophysics, not science fiction.*

As above, so below. Dark matter is, at least for now, invisible. However, it exerts a tremendous (and detectable) influence on the behavior of galaxies and the distribution of visible matter in our universe. It is humbling to consider that 95% of the *stuff* of our world lies outside the range of our senses. It is affecting us (and in some ways, even controlling us), yet we cannot see it.

The same can be said about shame, which is rightly called the Dark Matter of the Soul. Shame

**The First Emotion
in the Torah**

* Dark Matter: A hypothetical type of matter. The name refers to the fact that it does not emit or interact with electromagnetic radiation, such as light, and is thus invisible to the entire electromagnetic spectrum. Although dark matter has not been directly observed, its existence and properties are inferred from its gravitational effects such as the motions of visible matter, gravitational lensing, its influence on the universe's large-scale structure, and its effects on the cosmic microwave background. Dark Energy plus Dark Matter constitute 95.1% of the total mass–energy content of the cosmos.

is the first emotion mentioned in the Torah (1312 BCE), the Talmud (350–500 CE) concedes its dark influence,⁴ and the Maharal (1512–1609) calls it the most powerful motivating force of the psyche.⁵ Ambition, says Freud (1856–1939), arises from our need to avoid shame, to suppress all evidence of its presence, to divert attention away from our flaws and onto our achievements instead.⁶ The ego disintegrates in the face of shame and retaliates by banning it from awareness. Shame gets pushed to the outskirts of the psyche, and there it lurks. The ego keeps an eye on its mortal enemy and steers our lives along a course that it believes will minimize shame and, hopefully, avoid it. The ego employs elaborate defenses to keep it suppressed, including a host of decoys that divert our attention from shame's presence and its impact on our life-choices, love-choices, conflicts, etc.

In this way, behind the scenes, shame exerts a profound influence on our lives. It is the dark matrix of our psyche that pulls us here and pushes us there, or blinds us to this and addicts us to that, without us ever knowing that we've been scammed. Behind our seemingly innocent decisions is a determined (though unconscious) motive to deny (or repress) shame. It is staggering to contemplate the impact that shame surreptitiously exerts upon the shape of our lives.

Yet it is also true that the Creator designed the universe in precisely this way. If shame really is universal and inescapable, then it must be serving some essential purpose. Why else would the Creator make sure that everyone wrestles with it? This is the question explored herein.

This volume is rightly subtitled, “The Kabbalah of Shame.” Although it aims to be consistent with the knowledge base of psychology, it is primarily a metaphysical exploration of the phenomenon of shame. What is the origin of shame? What are its spiritual roots? How does shame further the purpose of creation? What is the most spiritually productive way to process shame? In the evolutionary unfolding of worlds—of light congealing into matter—where does shame come into the picture? These are the questions explored herein. Although this is not a self-help book, nevertheless, shame is a very real challenge that we face in our everyday lives. The final section of this book presents some practical advice about how to work with the challenge of shame that is present, more or less, in everyone’s life.

What could be shame’s productive purpose?